



3-D Soviet Style: *A Presentation on Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan*

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The information contained herein has been derived and determined through best practice and adherence to the highest levels of ethical, scientific and engineering investigative principles. The reported results, their interpretation, and any opinions expressed therein, remain those of the authors and do not represent, or otherwise reflect, any official opinion or position of DND or the Government of Canada.

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Abstract

3-D Soviet Style: A Presentation on Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan presents research on the history of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. The presentation analyzes Soviet efforts in defence, development and diplomacy during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. The research is based on up-to-date Russian and English language sources; and analysis of statistical data pertaining to the conflict. The authors, Anton Minkov and Gregory Smolynec, argue that previous studies of the subject are either inadequate or distorted by Cold War attitudes and that the Soviet experience offers many lessons to be learned in current efforts to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan.

Résumé

Les trois « D » à la manière soviétique : exposé sur les enseignements à tirer de l'expérience soviétique en Afghanistan. Le document se veut une analyse des efforts soviétiques en matière de défense, de développement et de diplomatie au cours du conflit russo-afghan (1979 à 1989). Les auteurs se penchent sur les aspects stratégiques, opérationnels et tactiques de l'action soviétique. L'étude se fonde sur de l'information actualisée publiée en russe et en anglais. Les données statistiques sur le conflit ont également été prises en compte. Les auteurs, MM. Anton Minkov et Gregory Smolynec, maintiennent que les études antérieures sur cette question sont soit lacunaires soit biaisées en raison de l'attitude qui prévalait à l'époque de la guerre froide. Enfin, selon eux, l'expérience soviétique a beaucoup à nous apprendre et, à ce titre, pourrait s'avérer fort utile pour les efforts de stabilisation et de reconstruction actuels en Afghanistan.

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Executive summary

This presentation is based on research conducted by CORA Strategic Analysts Gregory Smolynec and Anton Minkov on the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. The project was undertaken by the authors in 2006 for the purpose of determining whether this history offered any lessons to be learned for the Canadian Forces (CF) participating in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. At the start of the project, the CF had been conducting combat operations in Afghanistan for almost five years. Despite many successes in the areas of improving security, governance and development, the insurgency against the government of Afghanistan, the US troops and ISAF persisted.

3-D Soviet Style examines the history of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan and the evolution of Soviet strategy from the initial invasion through several stages to the withdrawal of Soviet combat forces in 1989. The presentation pays special attention to the problems the Red Army encountered in securing their lines of communication and to the efforts the Soviets made in building Afghan security forces. It includes information on the theory and practice of Soviet counter-insurgency in Afghanistan, and it provides information on the adjustments the Soviets made to their force structure and equipment in response to the exigencies of the operational situations they faced. 3-D Soviet Style outlines the state-building efforts the Soviets undertook in Afghanistan and their social and economic policies. The presentation also examines the policy of “National Reconciliation” adopted by the pro-Soviet government of Afghanistan to stabilize the country through internal and external diplomacy. The authors conclude that there are several lessons from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan that can be applied in the current situation. Among other lessons, the authors stress that engaging and enfranchising local populations and power centres is of critical importance; the economic stability and independence of Afghanistan is a key element in successful state-building; lines of communication are a critical vulnerability to insurgent attacks; successive battlefield victories do not guarantee strategic success; building Afghan security forces is vital; detailed knowledge of Afghan cultural and political dynamics is essential; and the movement of insurgents and materiel across the Afghan – Pakistan border is a paramount strategic problem.

In 2007 the presentation was delivered to the Government of Canada Environmental Scanning Group (16 January); a visiting Greek military delegation (LGen G. Triantafyllidis)(6 February); a visiting German delegation (BGen W. Freers) (14 February); CF Lessons Learned Oversight Committee (21 February); Privy Council Office, International Assessment Staff (7 March); Royal Canadian Military Institute (21 March); Cornwallis XII Conference “Analysis for Multi-Agency Support”(2 April); Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command, (LGen J.C.M. Gauthier) (1 May); CF Leadership Institute (3 May); the Canadian International Development Agency Afghanistan Task Force (20 June); the CF Joint Support Group Professional Development Conference (27 June); the Bulgarian Military College, Sofia, Bulgaria (July 2007). At the time of publication the presentation was scheduled to be delivered at the Canada – USA Operational Research and Analysis Symposium, US Military Academy (September, 2007); the Middle East and Central Asia Conference, Salt Lake

City (September 2007); and the International Biennial Conference of the IUS on Armed Forces & Society in Chicago (October 2007). The authors are also publishing their findings on the Soviet experience in Afghanistan in a series of papers.

Minkov, A. and Smolyne, G. 2007. 3-D Soviet Style: *A Presentation on Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan*. TM 2007-36 DRDC Centre for Operational Research & Analysis.

Sommaire

Cet exposé s'inspire d'une étude réalisée par deux analystes stratégiques du Centre d'analyse et de recherche opérationnelle (CARO), MM. Gregory Smolynec et Anton Minkov, sur l'expérience soviétique en Afghanistan. Les auteurs ont entamé leurs travaux en 2006, avec pour objectif de déterminer s'il était possible de tirer des enseignements de cette expérience, en vue de les appliquer à la participation des Forces canadiennes (FC) à la Force internationale d'assistance à la sécurité (FIAS) déployée dans ce pays. Les FC menaient alors des opérations de combat depuis près de cinq ans en Afghanistan. Malgré de nombreux progrès vers une amélioration de la sécurité, de la gouvernance et du développement, l'insurrection persistait contre le gouvernement afghan, les troupes américaines et la FIAS.

Le document intitulé « Les trois “D” à la manière soviétique » porte sur la campagne soviétique en Afghanistan, y compris sur l'évolution de la stratégie soviétique depuis l'invasion initiale jusqu'au retrait des forces combattantes, en 1989, en passant par plusieurs autres stades de la présence soviétique. Les auteurs accordent une attention particulière aux problèmes éprouvés par l'Armée rouge en ce qui concerne la sécurisation de ses voies de communication. Un accent particulier est également mis sur les efforts soviétiques visant à renforcer les forces de sécurité afghanes. De même, le document renferme de l'information sur les théories et les pratiques soviétiques en matière de lutte contre les forces insurrectionnelles en Afghanistan. Il nous apprend en outre comment les Soviétiques ont modifié la structure de leurs forces et leur matériel face aux exigences opérationnelles sur le terrain. Par ailleurs, il est aussi question des efforts soviétiques pour renforcer l'État afghan et des politiques sociales et économiques de l'occupant soviétique. Une partie de l'analyse est consacrée à la politique de « réconciliation nationale » adoptée par le gouvernement pro-soviétique de l'époque, en Afghanistan, pour stabiliser le pays à la faveur d'une action diplomatique intérieure et extérieure. En conclusion, les auteurs estiment qu'il est possible de tirer plusieurs leçons de l'expérience soviétique et que celles-ci peuvent s'appliquer à la situation actuelle. Entre autres leçons, les auteurs insistent sur l'importance cruciale de veiller à la participation et à l'émancipation des populations et des centres de pouvoirs locaux. Selon eux, la stabilité et l'indépendance économiques de l'Afghanistan sont également essentielles au renforcement de l'État afghan. Les autres enseignements à tirer s'énoncent comme suit : les voies de communication sont extrêmement vulnérables face aux attaques des insurgés; des victoires militaires successives sur le terrain ne garantissent pas le succès des efforts stratégiques; il est absolument essentiel de renforcer les capacités des forces de sécurité afghanes; il est également essentiel de bien comprendre les dynamiques culturelles et politiques afghanes; la circulation des insurgés et du matériel militaire à la frontière entre l'Afghanistan et le Pakistan suscite de graves préoccupations stratégiques.

En 2007, cet exposé a été présenté au Groupe chargé de l'analyse de l'environnement du gouvernement du Canada (16 janvier); à une délégation formée de militaires grecs (lieutenant-général G. Triantafyllidis) (6 février); à une délégation de militaires allemands (brigadier-général W. Freers) (14 février); au Comité chargé d'analyser les leçons apprises des FC (21 février); aux analystes de l'environnement international du

Bureau du Conseil privé (BCP) (7 mars); à l'Institut militaire royal du Canada (21 mars); à la 12^e Conférence Cornwallis sur le thème « Analyses en vue d'un soutien multi-agences » (2 avril); au Commandement des forces expéditionnaires canadiennes (lieutenant général J.-C.-M. Gauthier) (1^{er} mai); à l'Institut du leadership des FC (3 mai); au Groupe de travail sur l'Afghanistan de l'Agence canadienne de développement international (ACDI) (20 juin); à la Conférence sur le perfectionnement professionnel du Groupe de soutien interarmées des FC (27 juin); au Collège militaire bulgare, à Sofia, en Bulgarie (juillet 2007). Au moment de la rédaction, il était également prévu de le présenter au Symposium Canada-États-Unis sur la recherche et l'analyse opérationnelle; à la US Military Academy (septembre 2007); à la Conférence sur le Moyen-Orient et l'Asie centrale, à Salt Lake City (septembre 2007); à la Conférence internationale biennale de l'IUS sur les forces armées et la société, à Chicago (octobre 2007). Les auteurs présentent aussi leurs résultats sur l'expérience soviétique en Afghanistan dans une série de publications spécialisées.

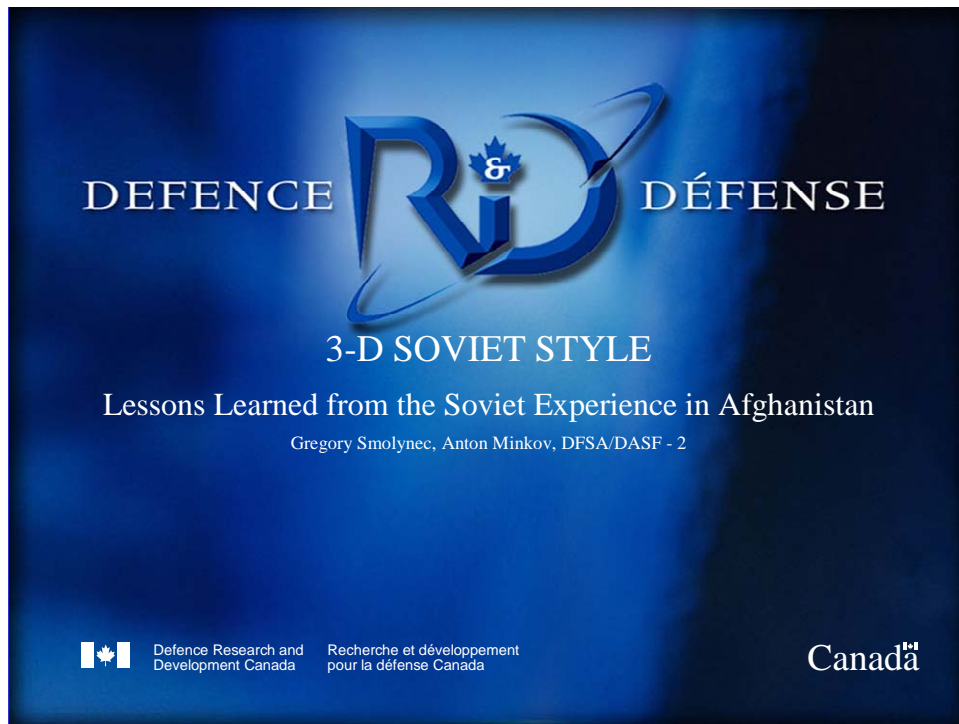
Minkov, A. and Smolyne, G. 2007. *3-D Soviet Style: A Presentation on Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan*. TM 2007-36 DRDC Centre for Operational Research & Analysis.

Table of contents

Abstract	i
Resume	i
Executive Summary	iii
Sommaire	iv
Table of Contents	v
Presentation	1

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Note: Highlighted text represents hyperlinks in the original presentation to additional slides.



Presentation Overview

- Relevance of Soviet Experience
- Development – social, political, economic
- Defence – military experience
- Diplomacy – internal & international efforts
- Conclusion – Lessons to be learned

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Chronology of Soviet Engagement

- 1979 Soviets invade & bear brunt of fighting
- 1985 Increased Afghan Army role
- 1986 Soviets limit combat operations
- 1989 Soviet withdrawal

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State of Research

- Cold War distortions
- No proper DND/CF assessment to date
- Russian assessment inadequate
- Research on Soviet development & diplomacy limited

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Is Soviet experience irrelevant?

- Afghan geography
- Ethnic & social divisions are persistent
- Basis for state legitimacy still very elusive
- The border with Pakistan

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Ethnographic Map of Afghanistan





Is Soviet experience irrelevant?

- Military presence needed to provide security to the new regime
- Challenge of balancing military ops with civil affairs
- Underrated insurgency – culture of resistance & the ideology of Jihad
- “Limited Contingent”

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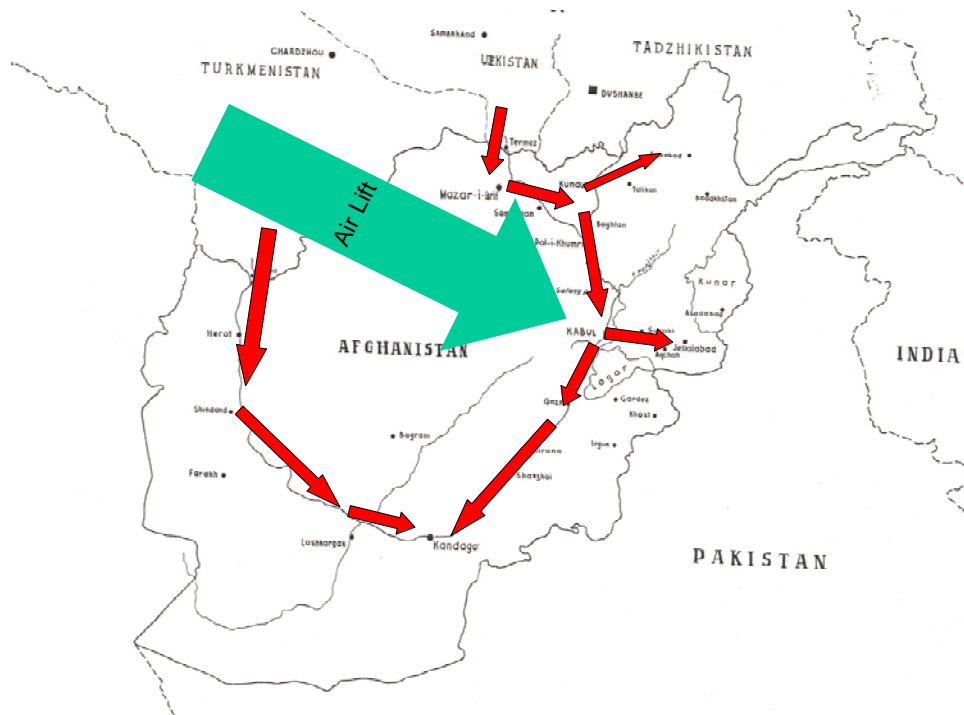


Defence - General observations

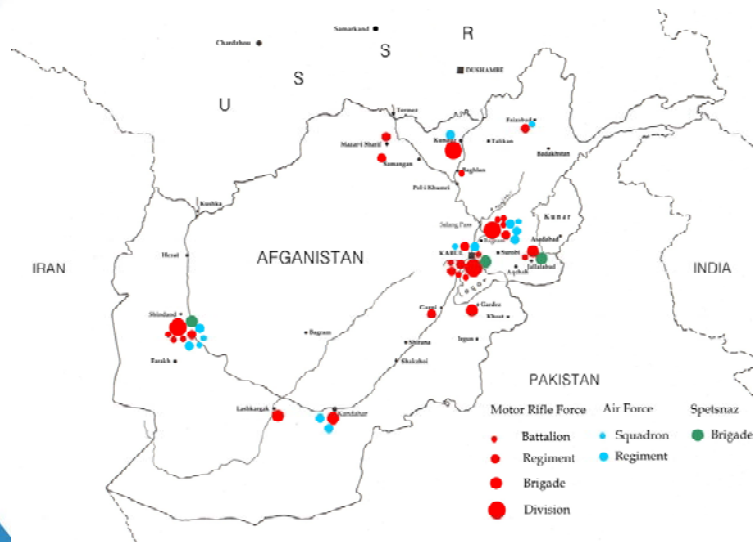
- Initial [strategy](#)
- Different kind of war
 - Elusive and decentralized enemy
 - Terrain not conducive to mechanized operations
 - Most operations - small scale
- Poor understanding of local divisions and dynamics
- Forces not enough to [control all territory](#)

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The Soviet Invasion



Soviet Bases



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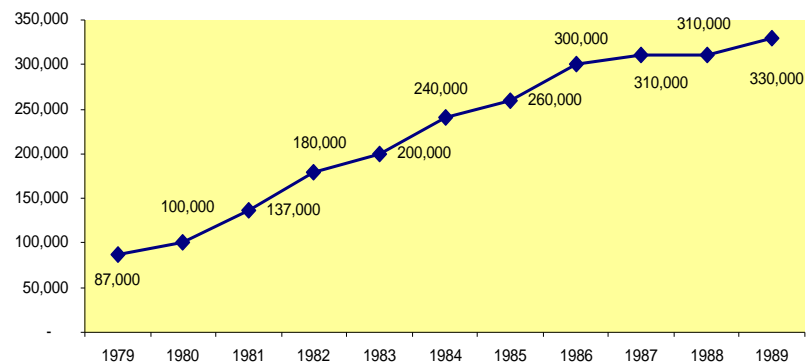
Adjustments - Strategic

- Overriding principle - minimal casualties
- Building up the strength of [DRA Forces](#)
- Focus on controlling the [LOC](#)
- Insulating and denying infrastructure support to the [insurgency](#)
- Security [outposts](#)
- [Deal making](#)
- [Withdrawal](#) from active combat after 1986

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Growth of DRA Forces

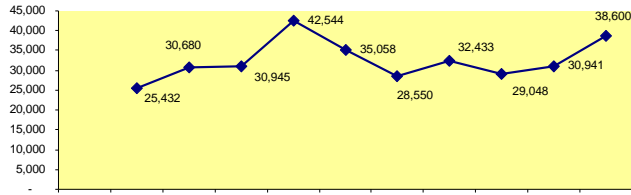


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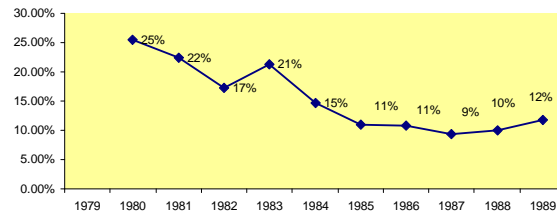


Desertion Rates

Number of Desertions per Year



Percent Desertions per Year



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DRA Forces breakdown (1988)

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Government Forces | • Militia on the side of government |
| – Army 90,000 | – Tribal 62,000 |
| – Border Guards 42,000 | – GDR 35,000 |
| – Gendarmerie 96,700 | – Self-defence 53,000 |
| – KhaD 68,700 | |
| – Special Guards 11,500 | |
| • Total 308,900 | • Total 150,000 |

Grand Total 458,900

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Soviet Counter-insurgency Approach

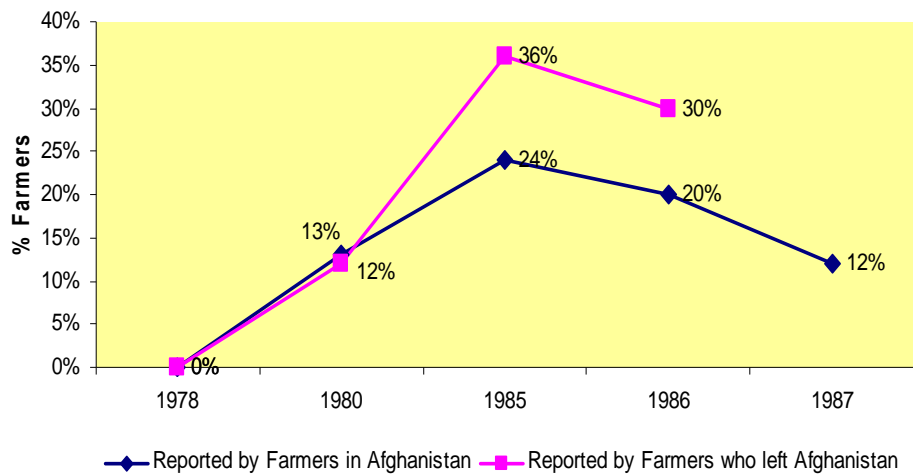
“I hold it a principle in Asia that the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict on your enemy.”

General M.O. Skobelev,
Conqueror of Turkestan, 1881

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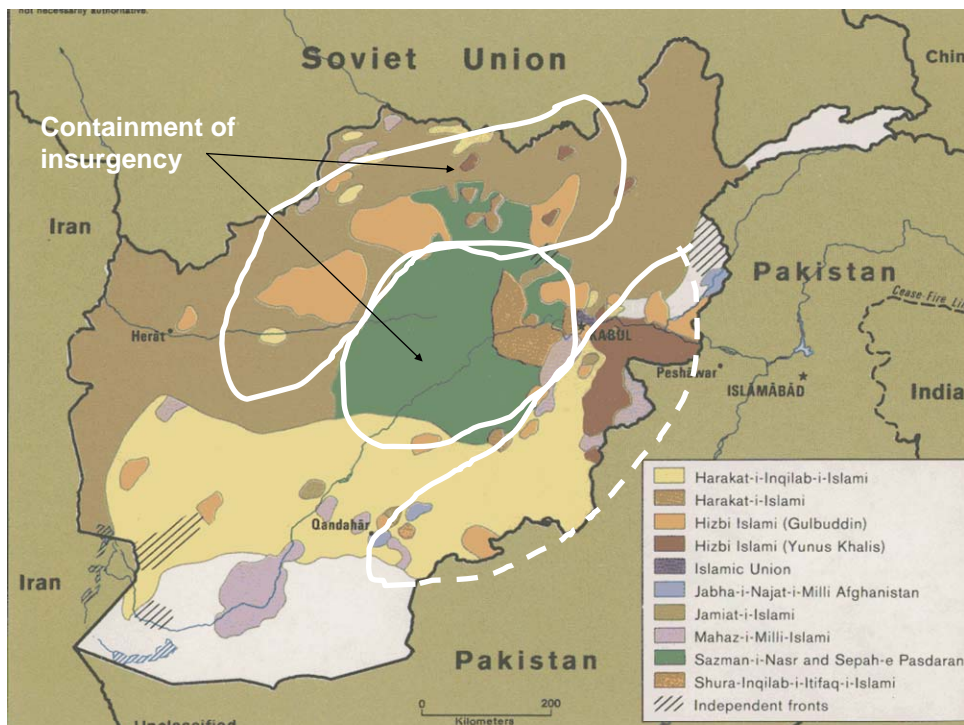
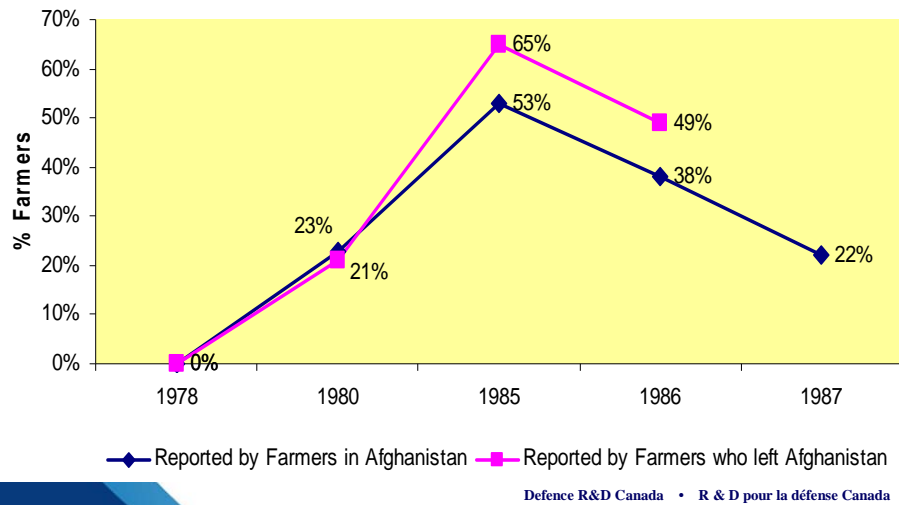
Effects of War - Destruction of Irrigation



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Effects of War - Bombing of Villages

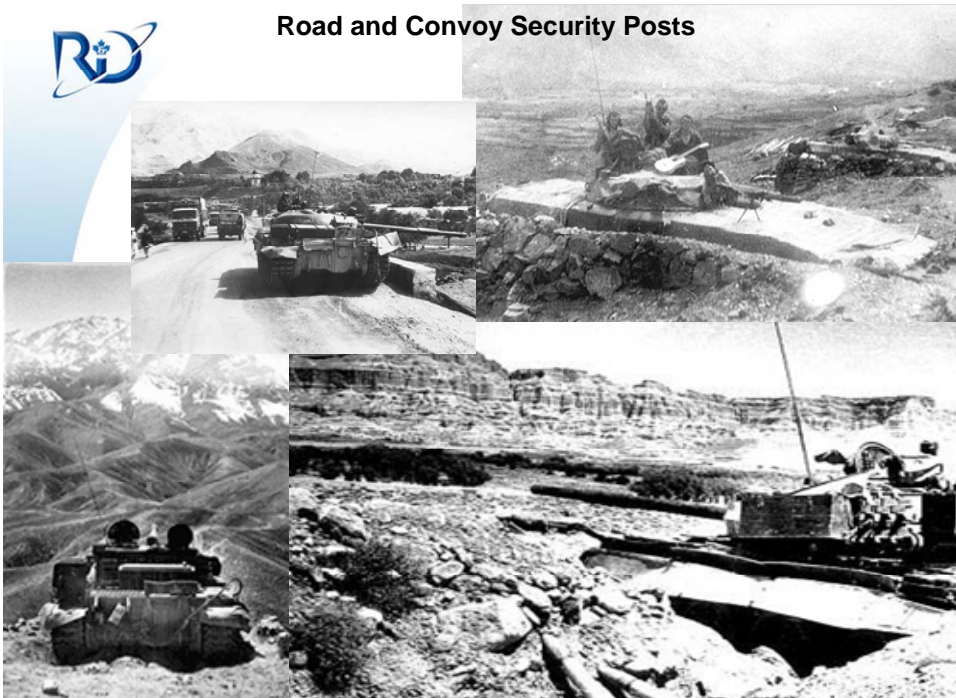




Outpost 21, Rukha, Panjshir Valley

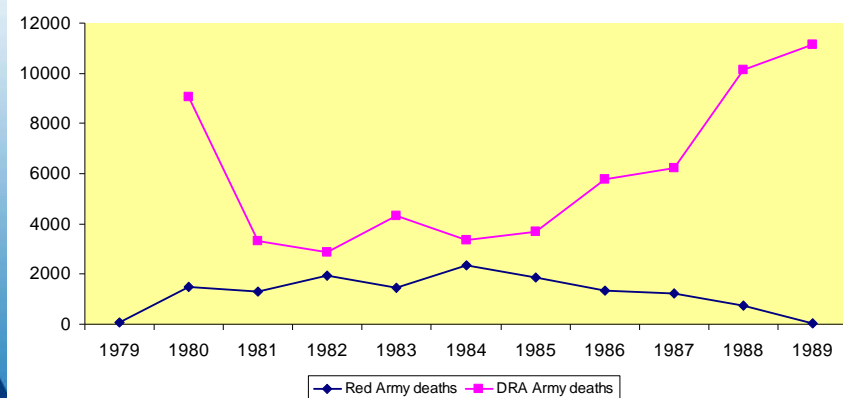


Road and Convoy Security Posts





Soviet and DRA Deaths

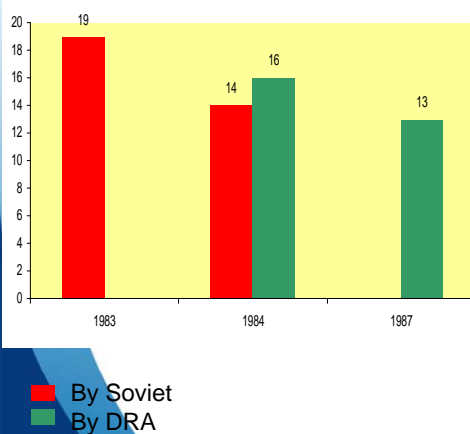


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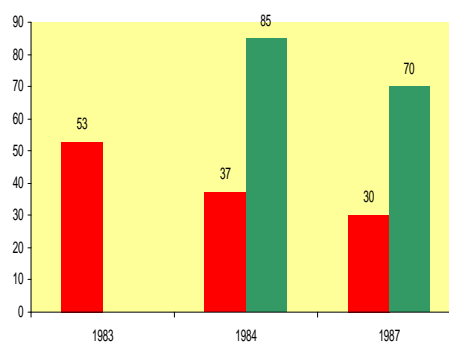


Border Sealing Activities

Ambushes (daily)



Caravan Interceptions (monthly)



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Soviet – Afghan joint operation



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Adjustments - Tactical

- Tactics devised to minimize losses
- Armed group concept
- Bounding overwatch
- Improvement of air assault and helicopter gunship tactics
- Enveloping detachments
- Use of special forces

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Adjustment - Force Structure

- Shift to smaller, independent units
 - 7 divisions \Rightarrow 4 divisions + independent units
- Withdrawal of tank and anti-aircraft units
- Decentralization of support structure
 - Support structure shifted from army and division level to battalion level
- Air power, air mobility used as a force multiplier
 - 50 to 300 helicopters
- Use of special forces
 - 20% of all Red Army special forces

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66 Reconnaissance company, Jalalabad



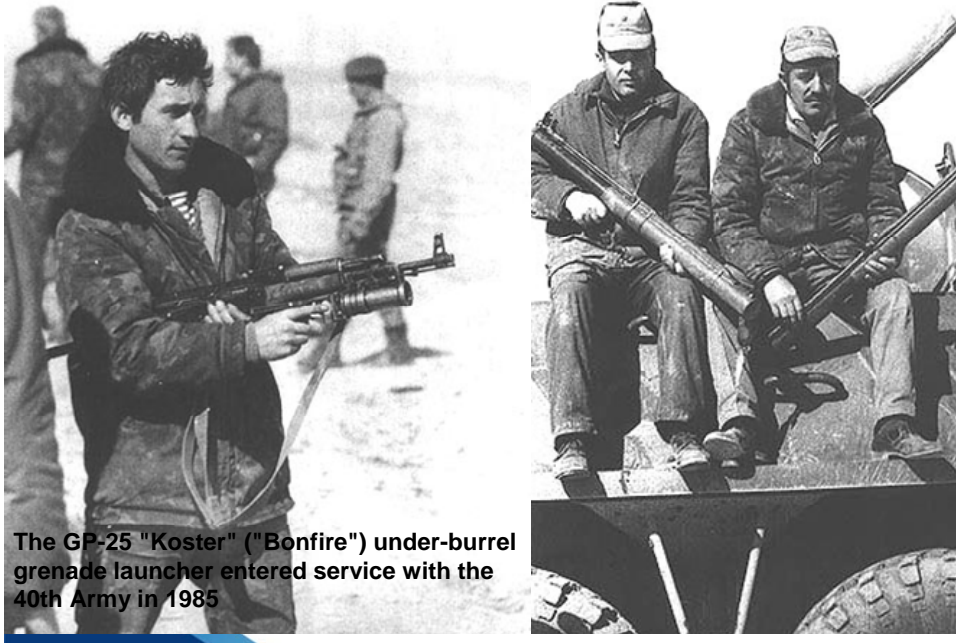


Adjustment - Equipment and Training

- New systems tested and introduced
 - personnel carriers, helicopters and helicopter gunships, but not tanks
- Improvements to infantry's personal gear and [firepower](#)
- Specialized mountain warfare training schools

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At the platoon and company level grenade launchers substituted for artillery. The RPG-18 "Mukha" ("Fly") was particularly handy due to its light weight.



The GP-25 "Koster" ("Bonfire") under-bore launcher entered service with the 40th Army in 1985



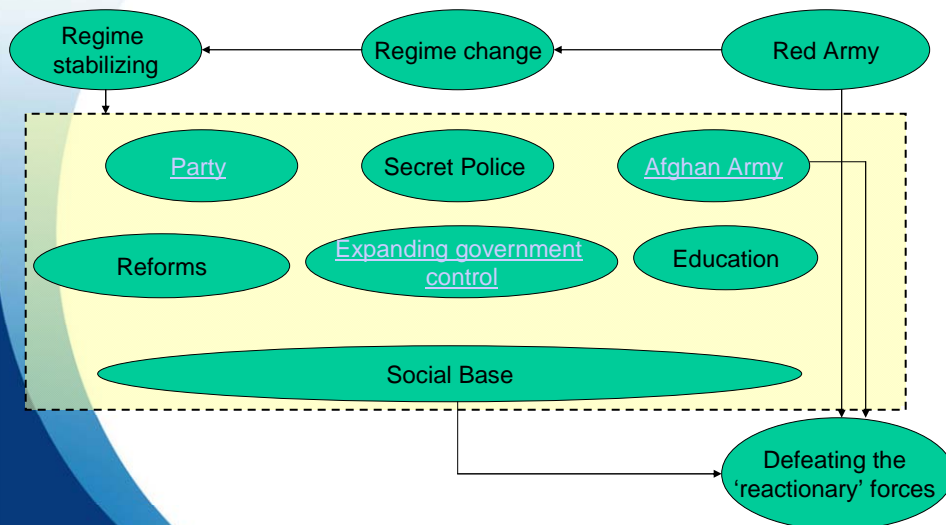
Adjustments - Tactical

- Armed group concept
- Bounding overwatch
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Development: State Building Strategy

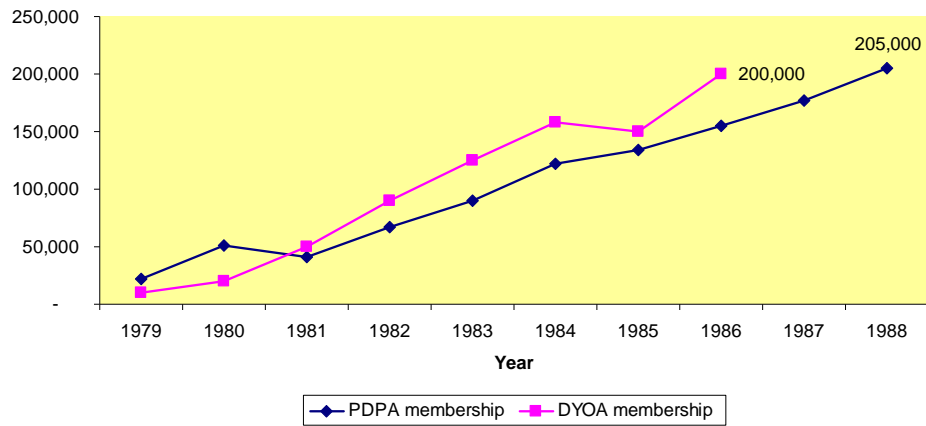


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Growth of PDPA

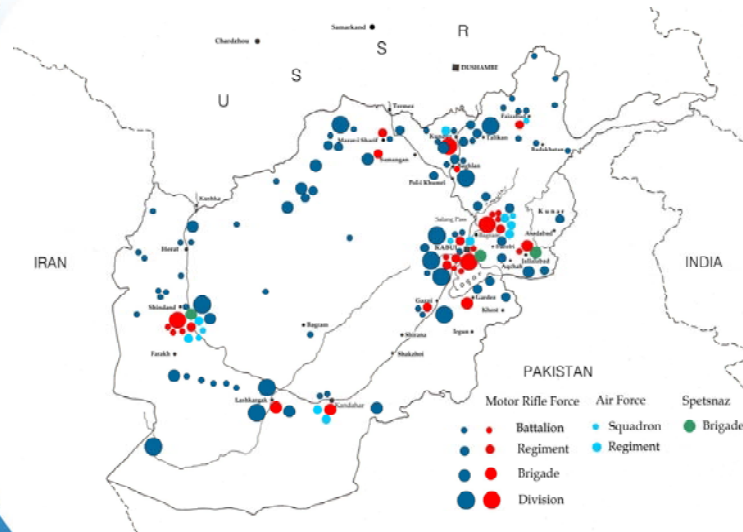
PDPA and DYOJA Membership Growth



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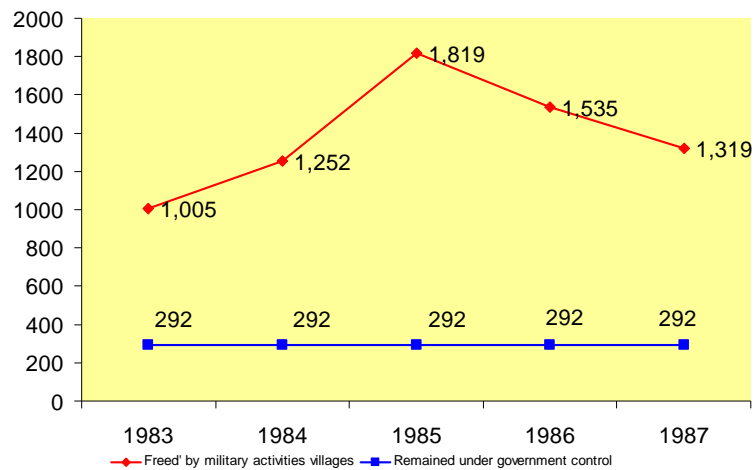
Soviet and DRA Bases



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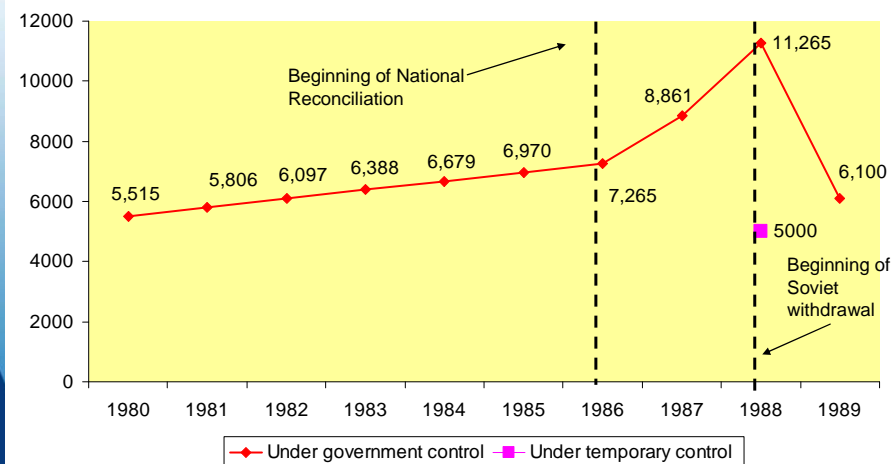
Limits of Military “Pacification”



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Number of Villages under Government Control



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Development: Economy

- Extensive prior Soviet economic investment
- Increasing the state share of national income
 - 1975 -10%; 1988 - 20% of GDP
 - in manufacturing - 80%
 - in the construction sector – 90%
 - in transportation – 60%
 - Oil and gas exploration – 100%
- Domestic revenue, excluding sales of natural gas
 - Growth of 142 % from 1977 to 1989 (13% per year)

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Development: Agriculture

- 60% of GDP, source of income for 80% of population
- Land reforms counterproductive
- Overemphasis on cooperatives, state farms
- Strategic Importance - object of contention
 - cash crops vs. foodstuffs
- Central for the counterinsurgency strategy
 - 20% of villages destroyed
- Ultimate result – destruction, import of foodstuffs
- The question of poppy growing

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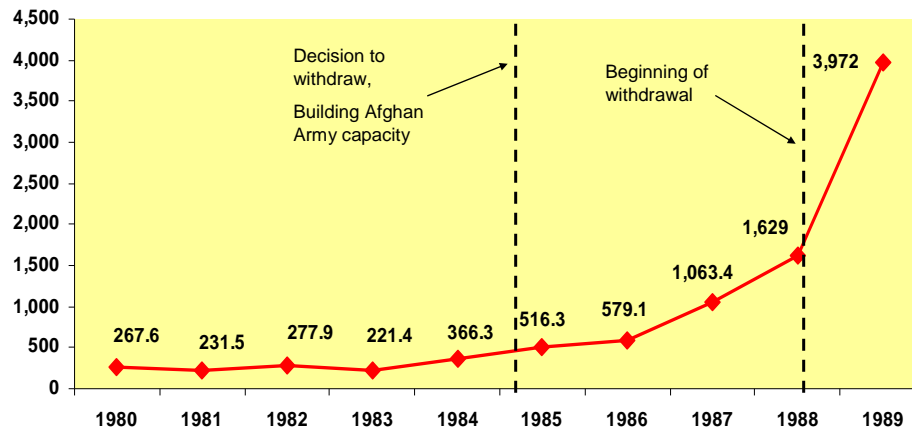
Development: Industry and Trade

- Objective – increase bilateral trade
- Industry – mining, gas exports
 - Exports at below market prices to USSR
 - Soviet technicians
- Manufacturing not encouraged
- [Economic integration](#)
- Economy survives on [foreign aid](#)
 - corruption

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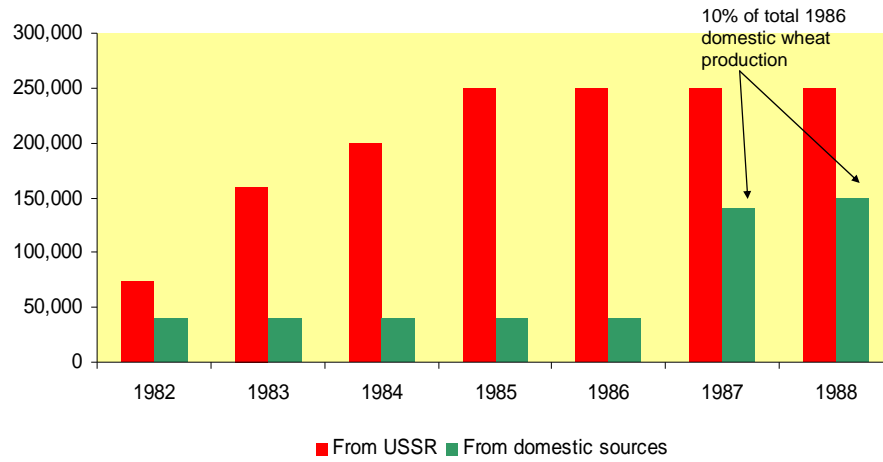
Soviet Military Aid (in Millions of Rubles)



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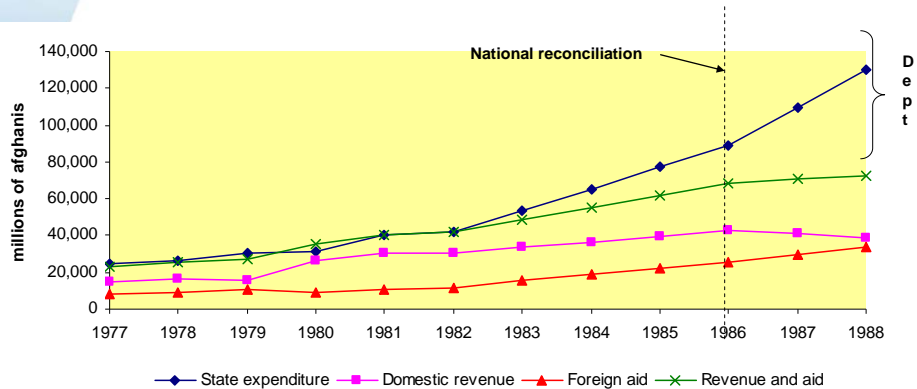
Wheat Supply (in tons)



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State Expenditure vs. Income

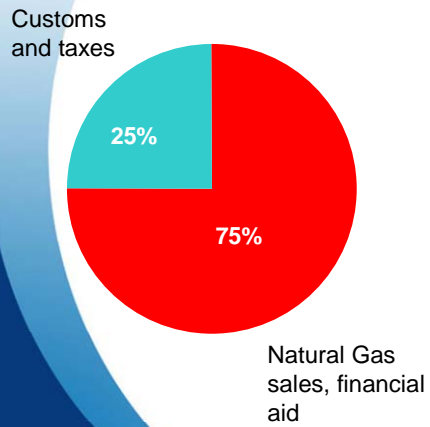


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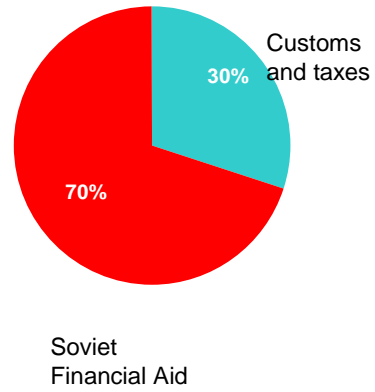


Sources of State Income

State Income, 1988



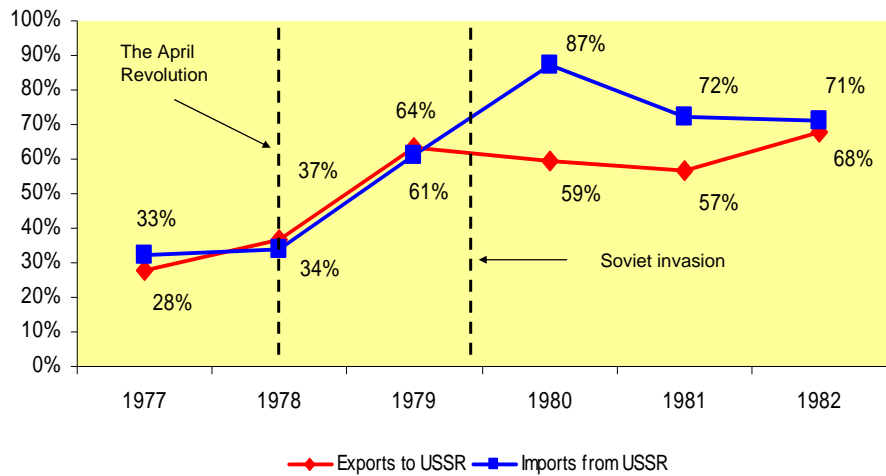
State Income, 1991



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Afghan Trade



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Diplomacy

- Internal
 - Unifying PDPA's factions
 - Policy of agreements with local leaders and mujahidin
 - Loya and local Jirgahs (1985)
 - Integrating the *ulema* (religious scholars) within state run religious system
 - Agitprop (CIMIC)
 - Promotion of [national reconciliation](#) and unity

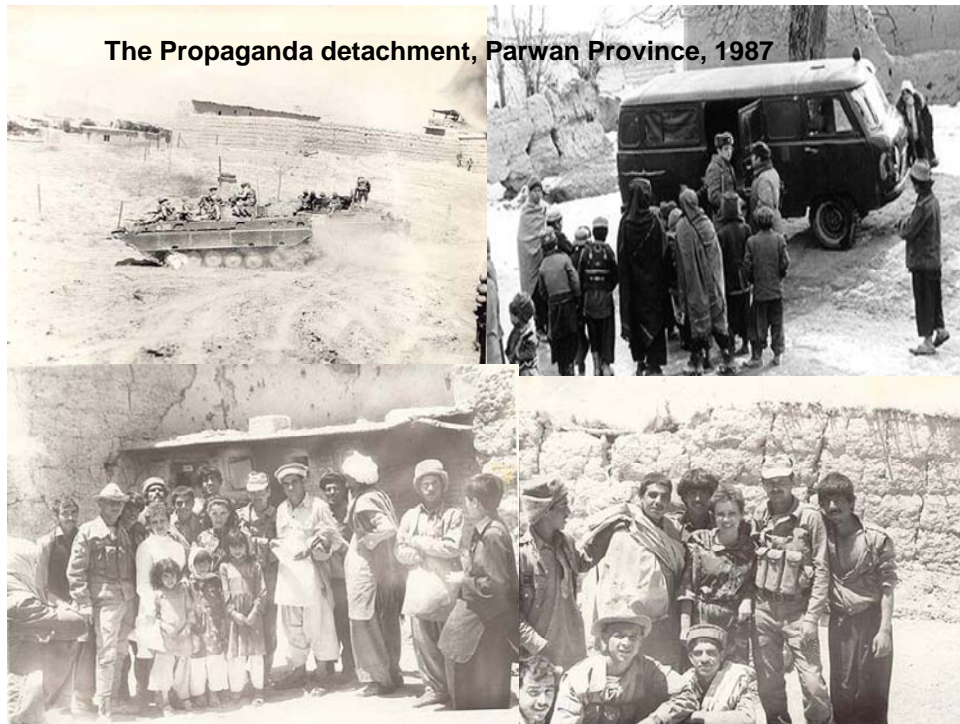
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Agitprop

- Part of force structure
- Composition
 - Military staff
 - Medical personnel
 - Party representatives
 - Entertainers
- Function
 - Spread of information, distribution of fuel, food, medical help, reconnaissance, negotiations
- Initiative gradually “afghanized”

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The Propaganda detachment, Parwan Province, 1987



Meeting devoted to the 68-th Anniversary of the October Revolution, 1986

Movie watching, 1986



Fuel distribution

Agitprop of the 108th MRD, 1985



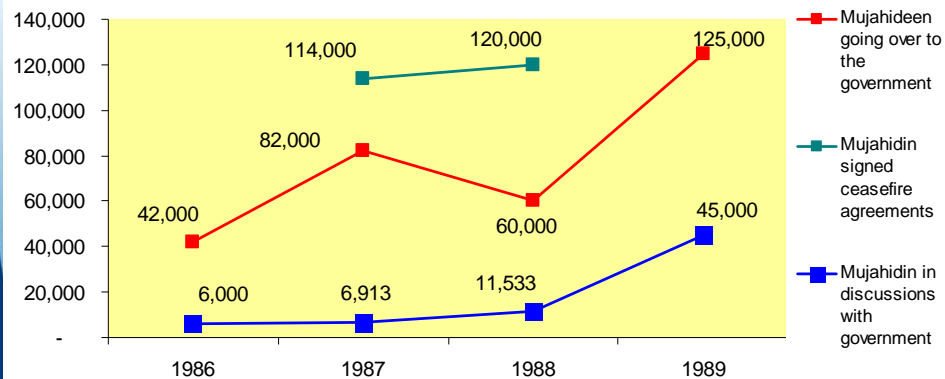
National Reconciliation

- More inclusive government
- Reversal of controversial reforms
- Socialism replaced with nationalism
- Promoting Islamic character of the state
- Accommodating and buying off resistance commanders
 -but not challenging their authority

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Reconciliation Process, 1986-89



By 1990, 25% of all non-government armed units had signed "reconciliation" agreements and 40% ceasefire agreements

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Case Study - Kandahar

- The “most difficult province” for the regime
 - Received 1/3 of all mujahidin weapons sent to Afghanistan
 - Every convoy on the Kandahar-Heart road attacked
 - Only one school open by 1982
 - Not a single village with a party organization
- Nurulhak Olumi, governor 1988-1990
 - Policy of using kinship ties to seek agreements with the population, building up local forces (militia)
 - Kandahar city population reaches pre-war levels
 - Mujahidin activities disappear

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International Diplomacy

- Objective – international recognition of the regime
- The Geneva talks
 - Mujahidin excluded
- Pressing Pakistan into not helping the insurgency
 - Negotiating with mujahidin in Pakistan
 - no significant military intervention as US in Vietnam

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The Costs

Soviets

- Killed..... 15,000
- Wounded..... 54,000
- Illnesses..... 416,000

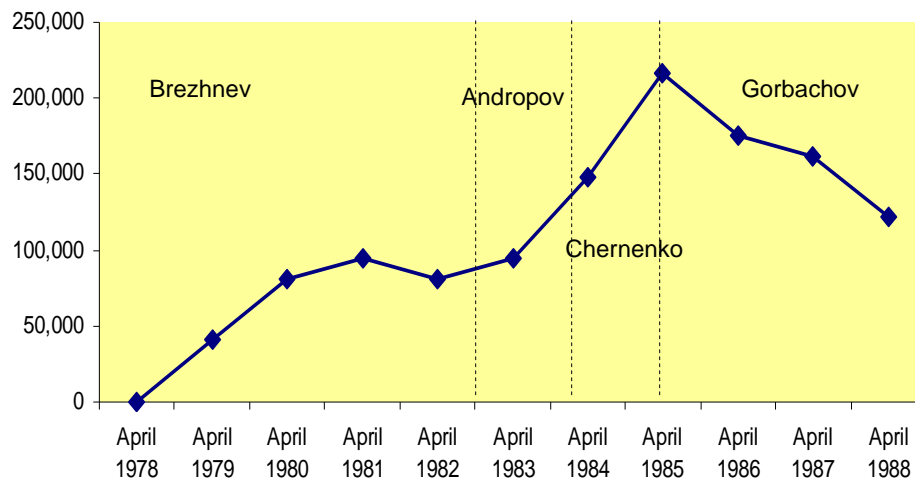
Afghans

- Killed1-1.3 million
- Refugees.....5 million

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Afghans Killed per Year



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Defeat or Strategic Withdrawal?

- Decision for withdrawal made in 1985
 - Based on shift of Party's global strategy
- DRA regime demonstrates increasing capacity
- National Reconciliation progressing
- Effects of Red Army withdrawal
- The Regime survives
 - ... but depends on foreign aid

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Lessons (to be) learned - State building

- Getting things done in Afghanistan requires local engagement
-but runs the risk of perpetuating local power centers that challenge central authority
- The Afghan government will be opposed by those left out of power/ not enfranchised
- Level of commitment is important for final outcome

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Lessons (to be) learned - State building

- Secular values conflict with Afghan traditional values
- Raising the population's standard of living is crucial
- Traditional dependence on foreign aid may slow development of government capacity
- Developing greater economic independence and countrywide market cohesion will facilitate nation building

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Lessons (to be) learned - Military

- Red Army's technical superiority and battlefield victories could not be translated into strategic success
- Local presence of troops important for regional security
- Greater force protection required on supply and patrol missions to reduce casualties
- Building Afghan forces was a viable exit strategy

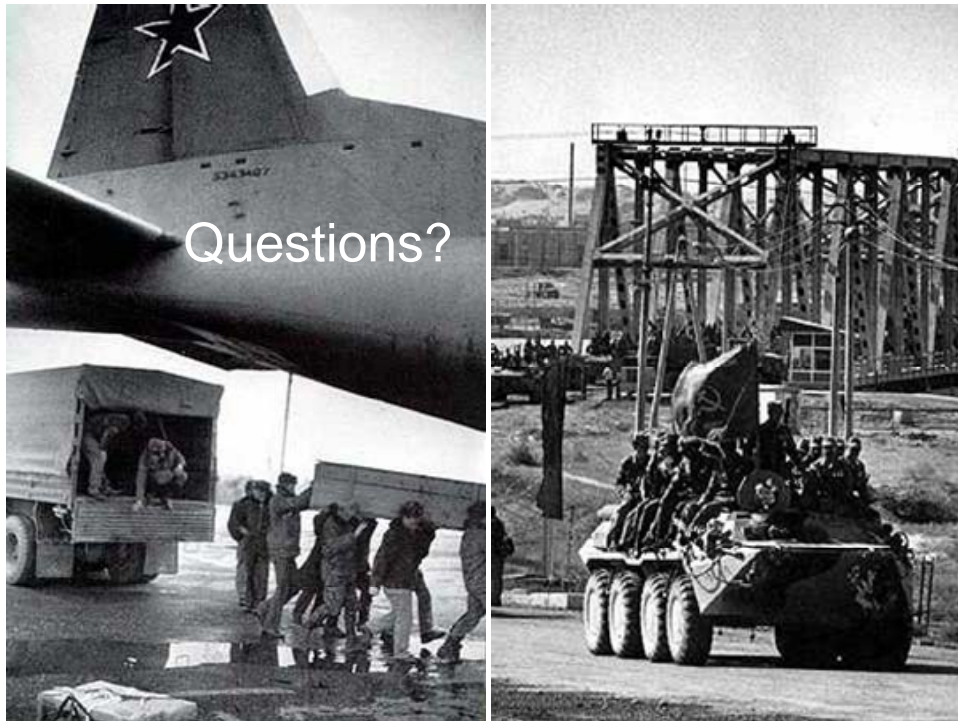
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Lessons (to be) learned - Diplomacy

- Ideological and cultural silos may prevent understanding of local dynamics
- Red Army withdrawal removed a principal cause of war for the insurgents
- The policy of “National Reconciliation” more successful than military operations
- Denying sanctuary in Pakistan impossible with a “limited contingent”

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